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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000855

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN MFA OFFICIAL ON POLICY TOWARDS SOMALIA,
SAYS PARTIAL MILITARY DRAWDOWN COMPLETE

REF: 08 ADDIS ABABA 718

Classified By: Amb. Donald Yamamoto. Reason: 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (S/NF) Ethiopian MFA Chief of the Minister's Cabinet Abdetu Dribssa (strictly protect) candidly told Emboffs on March 13 that the international community must realize that Ethiopia has genuine security interests in Somalia. He noted that Ethiopia had already drawn down its forces in Somalia to approximately 2,500 troops and had hid the drawdown from the insurgents. Abdetu reiterated the government's request for \$17 million to train 10,000 Transitional Federal Government (TFG) police. He observed that the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeeping force was unable to bring peace to Somalia. He explained that TFG President Yusuf was attempting to undermine the efforts of Prime Minister Nur "Adde" to reconcile with the opposition and noted that Yusuf was only interested in advancing his own agenda. Abdetu also remarked that Ethiopia would keep Somaliland and Puntland from major warfare, but noted that Ethiopia could not mediate between the two governments regarding their land dispute.

"ETHIOPIA HAS ONLY REALPOLITIK INTERESTS IN SOMALIA"

¶2. (S/NF) Abdetu opened by saying that Ethiopia desires a peaceful Somalia and does not have any sinister motives, but only to live in peace with its neighbors. He cautioned, however, that people needed to be realistic and understand that Ethiopia has real national security interests at stake in Somalia, and therefore, Ethiopia must remain involved. He added that the problems in Somalia, particularly in the south from Mogadishu to the Kenyan border, were more complex than the Somalis can address by themselves and if the international community wanted less Ethiopian involvement, the international community must step up and take a more active role.

¶3. (S/NF) When queried whether the Ethiopian government might become so fed up with the TFG that Ethiopia would throw up its hands and walk away, Abdetu responded only "if Ethiopia moved to Madagascar or Somalia moved to Madagascar." He emphasized that the two countries' fates were intertwined and Ethiopia could never afford to wash its hands of Somalia

completely.

"WE HAVE ALREADY DRAWDOWN IN SOMALIA"

14. (S/NF) In response to a query about a possible Ethiopian military drawdown from Somalia in June, Abdeta shook his head and stated that Ethiopia had already drawn down its forces in Somalia to approximately 2,500 troops. He explained that Ethiopia had hidden the drawdown to avoid alerting the insurgents. He added that most of the remaining Ethiopian troops were stationed around Mogadishu and Baidoa and that the ENDF was relying more heavily on Ethiopian trained TFG forces to provide security. He also said that the deployment to Somalia was costing the Ethiopian government about \$1 million dollars a day, but that no one had dared to add up the total cost for the operation since December 2006.

"WE NEED MONEY TO TRAIN TFG FORCES"

15. (S/NF) Abdeta acknowledged that the United States was playing a positive role in Somalia and noted that Washington understood that Ethiopia's role in Somalia was also positive. He then queried whether any progress had been made regarding Ethiopia's request for \$17 million to pay for the training of 10,000 TFG police. Abdetta emphasized that this was a small amount of money compared to what the African Union or United Nations would charge for the same services. He made it clear that the training of these additional forces was an integral part of Ethiopia's plan to be able to leave Somalia without

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creating a security vacuum.

16. (S/NF) Abdeta added that the TFG security forces Ethiopia had already trained had performed so well that the Somali people had nicknamed them "copies" to note they were as disciplined as the Ethiopian troops. He said the Ethiopian trained TFG forces did not loot and performed well under fire.

"AMISOM WILL NOT BRING PEACE"

17. (S/NF) Commenting that we should be honest about AMISOM, Abdeta said that the Foreign Minister cannot say publicly that AMISOM cannot build peace in Somalia, but we all know it is true they cannot do it. He said only the Somalis with the direct support of the international community can do that. Abdetta asked, "what does AMISOM actually do?" and noted that people do not openly acknowledge that Ethiopian forces are protecting the peacekeepers rather than the peacekeepers bringing peace to Somalia.

"YUSUF IS TRYING TO UNDERMINE THE PRIME MINISTER"

18. (S/NF) Openly critical of Yusuf, Abdeta characterized Yusuf "as an old man who spends too much time thinking about the future," and said Yusuf was actively trying to undermine Prime Minister Adde to ensure the PM does not appear more capable than himself. Abdetta stated that Yusuf was planning to run for President in 2009 and that he was obsessed with security and believed that the insurgents should be crushed. He noted that Yusuf did not see the PM as a threat himself--Yusuf did not believe the PM was capable of independent thought--rather the people around the PM were the problem. Abdeta added that Yusuf wanted to use the Ethiopian military to impose Yusuf's will rather than explore political compromise.

¶9. (S/NF) Abdeta went on to say that he personally believed that the PM's heart was in the right place and that the PM wanted to find a political solution. He said that the Ethiopian government viewed the PM positively and that the PM did not have "grand ambitions" like that of Yusuf. Abdetta was particularly concerned that Yusuf, in alliance with Libyan President Qaddafi, might be conspiring to have the PM impeached.

¶10. (S/NF) Abdeta opined that the TFG was not capable of standing without external support, but that no government in Somalia under the present circumstances could be. He suggested that the Islamic Courts would have fallen on its own had the international community not made mistakes in ¶2006. He criticized Islamic nations for giving them large amounts of cash and the United States for giving the Islamic Courts reason to fight in Mogadishu.

"WE WILL KEEP SOMALILAND AND PUNTLAND FROM FIGHTING"

¶11. (S/NF) The Ethiopian government would keep Somaliland and Puntland from major fighting, but Ethiopia could not mediate between the two, Abdeta said. He drew two interlocking circles on a piece of paper and pointed out that Sanag and Sool, the disputed regions represented in the overlapping lines, were claimed by both Somaliland and Puntland and asked, "how can Ethiopia tell them what belongs to whom?" He explained that Puntland had miscalculated by mistreating Dulbahante clansmen who had defected from Somaliland and when those Dulbahante switched back to Somaliland, it allowed Somaliland to extend its control eastward. He added that the Somaliland government lacks capacity not policy and that Somaliland officials had to be careful not to antagonize those parts of its population sympathetic to the TFG opposition because Somaliland.

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COMMENT

¶12. (S/NF) Abdeta side-stepped the issue of when and under what conditions Ethiopia might pull most of its remaining forces out of Somalia, but indications from other government officials (reftel) are that the government is increasingly unwilling to sustain the financial and human costs of attempting to maintain security in Somalia. Although Abdeta made it clear that Ethiopia would always have an interest in Somali affairs, he did not commit to unending support for the TFG and it is clear that Ethiopian frustration with the TFG is increasing. Post encourages the Department to consider seriously how the United States can contribute toward security sector training for TFG police and defense forces.
END COMMENT.
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